

INTERVIEW: In fighting for girls' education, UN advocate Malala Yousafzai finds her purpose

5 October 2017 – More than 260 million children, adolescents and youth are out of school around the world, according to the United Nations. Despite some progress in achieving gender equality in the world's poorest countries, far more girls than boys still do not have access to a quality education,

Research has shown that educating girls, in particular, has a 'multiplier effect'. Educated girls are more likely to marry later and have fewer children, who in turn will be more likely to survive and to be better nourished and educated. Educated women are more productive at home and better paid in the workplace, and more able to participate in social, economic and political decision-making.

Earlier this year, UN [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres designated education activist and Nobel Laureate Malala Yousafzai as a UN Messenger of Peace with a special focus on girls' education. Ms. Yousafzai began speaking out for girls' education at the age of 11 in her native Pakistan. After surviving an assassination attempt by the Taliban in 2012, she co-founded the Malala Fund with her father Ziauddin to champion every girl's right to 12 years of free, safe, quality education.

In September, the Malala Fund started the Gulmakai Network to support the work of education champions in developing countries and speed up progress towards girls' secondary education around the world. The 20-year-old, who will be attending Oxford University, spoke to *UN News* about the need to increase investment in education, the importance of allowing girls to be who they want to be, and when it was that she discovered the power of her own voice and the purpose for her life.

UN News: Tell us more about the new initiative the Malala Fund is carrying out to help girls education in a number of countries.

Malala Yousafzai: The Malala Fund started the Gulmakai Network, and the goal of this mission is to empower local leaders and some local activists. So we support them and we are already working in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nigeria, and also the Syrian refugee areas. So we want to increase that investment and also support local advocates, as well as local girl advocates. So for that we have \$3 million and we want to expand that group, redouble our efforts, and make sure we can give to as many local activists as we can because they are the real change-makers in their community, and when we empower them, through them, we can bring change.

VIDEO: Malala Yousafzai discusses her push for global education, her motivations in continuing her campaigns, and how she came to be the person

she is.

UN News: Specifically, how would you like to see this money used?

Malala Yousafzai: We will invest in local leaders and local activists. These local activists speak out, locally, nationally; they campaign for girls' education. For example, in Nigeria, our activists, together with the Malala Fund, campaigned to ensure that the Nigerian Government increased education from 9 years to 12 years. So we succeeded in that campaign and it became part of the law. We are doing similar campaigning in Pakistan and Afghanistan. We are also including teachers' training. We are also including empowering others girls and helping them so they can also talk to leaders. It also includes e-learning and other improvements in the quality of education. So it's a vast project that covers many areas but our main goal is to empower local leaders.

UN News: What are some of the things you observed in your efforts to promote girls' education during your travels?

My goal is very clear, and that is to continue fighting for girls' education, their empowerment, their rights.

Malala Yousafzai: So this year I went on a Girl Power trip and I went to America, Canada, then Nigeria, Iraq, and Mexico, and in these places I met amazing and incredible girls and I heard their inspiring stories. In Iraq, I met a girl called Najla. She was 14 years old when she was wearing her wedding dress and she took off her high heels and she escaped from her wedding. She ran away. And later on, her village was captured by the extremist ISIS and she was actually attacked but she did not stop. She is still continuing her education, speaking out... and she wants to be a journalist.

These are the stories that inspire me but my aim is to bring these stories into a global platform like the UN and allow these girls to meet their country leaders and local leaders so their voices can be raised.

UN News: You also brought a young woman from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. What was her story? What made you bring her to the UN to speak to world leaders?

Malala Yousafzai: So in Lancaster, in America, I met this young girl, and I think she did not know what my story was but she was telling me her story. She really inspired me because she went through a lot of difficulties in her country, [DR] Congo, and how she saw brutalities in front of her eyes. Her family members were killed. She has seen worse than what we can ever imagine but she resisted all those conflicts, all those wars that she saw. And now she is in the US, she is fighting every day. She's achieving her dreams to be a nurse, and her name is Marie Claire. And I am really proud of her, and I am there to support her so she can achieve her dreams but also so she can speak for other girls like her.



Malala Yousafzai responds to a question from the audience as Secretary-General António Guterres looks on. UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

UN News: What would you say is your key message to world leaders?

Malala Yousafzai: I'm just reminding them of their responsibilities – that they are holding the positions in which they are responsible for their people and for the future generation. I remind them that they have to increase investment towards schooling, towards quality education, otherwise we would lose these future generations. This would impact not just the children, not just the girls, but all of us. So we have to invest towards the 130 million girls who are out of school, we have to support them, we have to stand with them, and make changes in the law and also take action.

UN News: What can men do to help achieve education for girls?

We have to believe in our sisters, in our daughters and allow them to be who they want to be.

Malala Yousafzai: Well I think men have to do a lot. My father is an inspiration because his five sisters could not go to school. So, he decided he would allow his own daughter to go to school, to get her education, and then to raise her voice. When we started campaigning in Swat Valley, when terrorism started and girl's education was banned, there were many other girls who wanted to speak out but their parents, their brothers did not allow them. My father was the one who did not stop me.

We have to believe in girls, we have to believe in our sisters, in our daughters and allow them to be who they want to be. As my father says, you do not have to do something, just do not clip their wings, just let them fly and let them achieve their dreams. So men have to come forward, they have to support women. It's better for the whole economy, better for each and every one of us. It will help the economy to grow even faster, it will improve the standards of living of each and every one of us, it would improve health. It also benefits the children because when women are educated, they are more likely to take care of their children, and their education, and their future.

UN News: How do you relate to your parents and brothers, and manage to have a little bit of fun in the midst of all the things you're doing?

Malala Yousafzai: So I'm grateful that I have such a beautiful family. Both of my parents have supported me and always stand with me, and for them I'm just their daughter. It's just like when other parents have a daughter, they love her, they take care of her. But then I have two younger brothers, and as usual brothers are cheeky ... We still fight, we still argue. My brothers, they just don't care what awards I'm winning or who I am or if I am ambassador or something, or UN Messenger of Peace.



Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed (left) meets with Malala Yousafzai, global advocate for girls' education and the youngest-ever Nobel Peace Prize laureate. UN Photo/Evan Schneider

UN News: When you became the youngest winner of the Nobel Prize, what did your brothers say to you?

Malala Yousafzai: So when I won the Nobel Peace Prize and I came back to the hotel where we were staying, my little brother started saying: 'Look you have won the Nobel Peace Prize but it does not mean you become a bossy sister.' They want to me be just as normal as I was.

UN News: You're getting ready to go to Oxford University. Tell us about that.

I want to help as many girls as I can to make sure they get quality education and achieve their dreams.

Malala Yousafzai: So I always wanted to get quality education, to go to a good university, it was my dream, and now that dream has come true and I am going to Oxford. I really worked hard for it ... And I was so happy when I received the offer. I'm excited to meet new people, to make friends, to learn. It is a great place of learning. I also want to enjoy a bit as well, to have some time with friends, and just to live like a normal student.

UN News: What are you hoping to be 5, 10 years from now, after Oxford?

Malala Yousafzai: It's hard to say what I want to be in the coming 10, 20 years because my mission and my goal is very clear, and that is to continue fighting for girls' education, their empowerment, their rights. In that I will continue my journey. But in the coming years, I want to complete my education. I want to continue working on education. I want to empower more young girls like me so that it's not just about one girl speaking out but we have hundreds and thousands of girls speaking out. We give them a voice. We give them a platform. Once you encourage them, once you tell them that your voice can change the world, then they can do it, they can come forward and speak out for themselves.

UN News: Maybe you'll be UN Secretary-General?

Malala Yousafzai: I'm not sure about that.



Nobel Prize Laureate and UN Messenger of Peace Malala Yousafzai being interviewed, with her father, Ziauddin Yousafzai, looking on. UN Photo/Mark Garten

UN News: What would you tell a young girl of eight or nine to inspire her to

keep rising like you?

Malala Yousafzai: So I started speaking out when I was only 11 years old, and I did not know if my voice would have any impact or not. But when I got attacked I realized that my voice was powerful, and it did reach to those people, and they were scared of my voice. So believe in your voice, believe in yourself, and always follow your dreams. Because especially young girls, they dream big but as they grow older they start underestimating themselves, they do not believe in themselves, they don't dream big. So I would ask all young girls to dream big, as big as you can, and just follow your dreams and you can do anything.

UN News: You have shown tremendous courage, resilience. What within you gives you that power?

Malala Yousafzai: I have seen a lot in my life from terrorism, extremism, to then being attacked. And I was at the point where I had to make a decision [about] whether I want to continue my campaign for girls' education or not. And I've been away from my home in Pakistan for a long time. So going through all these situations in my life, I've learnt that, now surviving that attack, this life is for a purpose and that is for the education of children. It's only 70, 80 years that we live, and why not live it for a good purpose? Why not live it for a service that can help humanity, that can help the world. So I want to help as many girls as I can, to make sure they get quality education and achieve their dreams.

FEATURE: In Western Afghanistan, an ancient love of poetry thrives again

5 October 2017 – As she begins to read her poem, Fatema's voice is faint and unsure of itself. She has been writing poetry only for the last six months because, as she explains, she wants to get in touch with her inner feelings. What emerges in her recitation has echoes of Afghanistan's ancient past, and signs of a new and modern passion. What is heard, translated from Dari, is a short narrative about the horrors of war – "The color of blood and cold corpses ... fresh bodies thrown into battle" – and Fatema's own story, one that ends with the hope that, "somewhere between the lines, set in the sweetness, is a space without war."

Afghanistan has for centuries been a cradle of poetic expression. One of the world's best-known poets, Jalaluddin Mohammad Balkhi, or "Rumi," was born here over 800 years ago. His lines of poetry, in ancient Dari, speak to the thoughts of many Afghans, as do the lines of other great Persian, Pashtun and Arab writers.

Much of Afghanistan's newfound love of poetic expression – which has taken hold in Kabul and Kandahar as well – is coming from young Afghans seeking new ways to interact and express themselves.

What is extraordinary about the graceful expressions this afternoon at the Herat Literary Association, however, is the newfound enthusiasm combined with the clicks of cell phone technology – which together suggest a cultural revival amid the uncertainty of war. Much of Afghanistan's newfound love of poetic expression – which has taken hold in Kabul and Kandahar as well – is coming from young Afghans seeking new ways to interact and express themselves.

“Our words are – in their way – a defense against war,” said Fatema Rahimi, 23. “Poetry is important to me because it can describe aspects of the conflict.”

Weekly in Herat, poets meet to share their latest works. Some bring freshly printed booklets marked by ornate calligraphy but others read directly from lines composed on their phones. Invariably, as new poems are read out around the table mixed with men and women, a round of applause will go up as the poem ends. This is, however, the moment that the sometimes-dreaded critique begins, often initiated by rows of sharp-dressed young ladies, who are quick to remark on what they think is imprecise imagery or inappropriate language.

The poetry is as often about love as it is about conflict, and an observer quickly notices that there is a curious interplay between the young men and women in the room. When an excited young man reads a poem about a tiger, representing a man, chasing a lovely gazelle draped in a veil, several women chirp up to insist that the veil seems out of place. When another man talks about an unattractive bride, who runs from her groom, stumbles and falls, only to be laughed at by a wedding party, the women are incensed. “You shouldn't joke about the plight of women!” one pregnant mother snaps. “I'm not critiquing your language, only your subject matter.”

When another first-time participant reads from a pamphlet of poems printed inside a glossy yellow cover, the women nod in appreciation and give him kind advice. One says, “It was beautiful but I didn't find enough meaning in it,” adding, “You need to play more with the language, don't be so direct, and a study of the classics will help you.”



Fatema Rahimi, (left), reads her poetry aloud to a group of 30 poets in Herat, Afghanistan. Above her is a portrait of Afghanistan's most famous poet, Maulana Mohammed Balkhi, also known as “Rumi.” Photo: UNAMA/Fraidoon Poya

Yet most of the poetry is subtle if not profound, hinting at notions of spiritualism, and an Afghan sense of the transcendental.

“I grew up with poetry,” said Ghulam Haidar Ghudsi, 35, who looks forward to

his weekly indulgence at the literary association. “We are tired of war. There are poems for peace, but after all, things happen all around us, even suicide bombers. In my district, up along the Turkmen border, the Taliban are active and it is hard to even move.

“I like the Sufist poetry – that of Maulana [Rumi] Jalaladdin Mohammed Balkhi,” he added. “I like his outlook. His poetry – particularly his imagery – speaks to me about peace. I’ve learned that there is a big difference between my moon [romantic aspirations] and where the moon rises, and his imagery makes this clear to me. I can tell you this, though, the school of Maulana promotes peace, not a culture of violence.”

In the United States and Europe, Rumi is a highly-appreciated poet and sales of his poetry have skyrocketed in recent years even as many in North America and Europe do not recognize him as an “Afghan poet,” since he rose to fame in Persia and Turkey, after his family left Afghanistan. The Sufi school of thinking that he founded and led still prides itself in creativity, tolerance, and an emphasis on unique spiritual journeys.

It is not clear what the growing popularity of poetry will mean for Afghanistan. In many cases, poetry serves as a welcome outlet for frustrated men and women, who often feel cornered by war and tied down by tradition. Still, the interest is growing, and though the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan ([UNAMA](#)) helps support events at the Herat Literary Association, the price to participate is always minimal, particularly when you compose lines on your phone as many literary club members do.

“I’m not a poet myself,” said UNAMA Public Information Officer Fraidoon Poya. “But I like to come and listen. There is a special magic in the room every week. I like to hear the new voices, the young men and women who come looking to be heard for the first time.”

The literary association’s Secretary-General, M. Daoud Monir, said he has seen a newfound appreciation of poetry across Western Afghanistan, one that is growing quickly and is often in line with aspirations for peace.

“These gathering give the youth a chance to express their views – even, as you see, when they contradict each other. On any given week, you can be sure that the main subject will be war and peace, but there is a lot going on here, including that these sessions give our women a chance to critique the patriarchy.”

The UN Assistance Mission for Afghanistan (UNAMA) has a mandate to support the Government of Afghanistan and its citizens in a shared goal of becoming a stable, open and peaceful nation. This feature story highlights one of the many ways the UN and Afghanistan are working together to overcome the many challenges to achieving this goal.

Asylum and refugee protection represent 'humanity at its best,' says senior UN official

5 October 2017 – Warning of threats to the global asylum environment, the United Nations refugee agency's protection chief today stressed the importance of sustained engagement by the international community to keep refugees high on the political agenda.

"The interest in refugee and displacement-related issues tends to [wax and wane](#). We are already seeing a different dynamic today than in 2015, when refugees were foremost on the political agenda," Assistant High Commissioner for Protection Volker Türk said in a key address to the annual Executive Committee meeting of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)) in Geneva.

"Sustained engagement is required, especially to address protracted refugee and internal displacement situations, but also new large movements of [refugees and migrants](#)," he added, stressing that every nation must exercise its responsibility towards all people – nationals and non-nationals alike – who are subject to the jurisdiction of a country.

"Providing protection and hope for the future does not take anything away; if properly managed, it adds and enriches," Mr. Türk explained, adding: "Sometimes this gets forgotten in the media chatter and myopic political discourse where abstract concepts and ideologies obscure the realities of human beings in distress."



Assistant High Commissioner for Protection Volker Türk (left) speaks with an elderly woman in a Rohingya village near Maungdaw, northern Rakhine State, Myanmar, on 12 July 2015. Photo: UNHCR/K. Rochanakorn

He added that: "Asylum and refugee protection are not things thrown easily to the wind. They represent humanity at its best, and respect for each human being." In this regard, next year's [Global Compact on Refugees](#) will help to sustain this much-needed interest, he said, referring to an internationally agreed document on the refugee issues to be adopted by UN Member States in 2018. He said the proposed compact would broaden support base by building new and reinforcing old partnerships, such as with the World Bank, regional bodies, civil society, and the private sector, and encourage much stronger commitments to resettlement and complementary pathways. The compact would also enable greater predictability and investment in the future by strengthening the resilience of both refugees and hosting communities. "This is a tall order, but it is achievable if we work on it together," he told representatives of 151 States that make up the Executive Committee. On

international protection, Mr. Türk said violations of international refugee law are “wide-ranging and occur in all parts of the world.” “In particular, they have included killings of refugees by the military,” he said, adding that there has also been a surge in serious incidents of *refoulement*, the forced return of refugees.

The essence of international protection lies in identifying and recognizing the needs of people fleeing conflict, violence, human rights abuses, and other serious predicaments in their country of origin

Another major worry is an increasing trend in deterrence measures by governments. Prolonged, arbitrary, and indefinite detention of asylum-seekers and refugees continues in a number of countries, including in so-called ‘regional processing centres,’ he said.

“Granting asylum and protecting refugees is a humanitarian, non-political act,” he said, stressing that some politicians have cast aside humanity in favour of short-term political gains, arguing that they were acting in defence of the liberty, security, and safety of their citizenry.

“This is dangerous – not just for the many refugees whose lives are affected as a result, but also for the citizens in whose defence governments purport to act,” he said. A variety of terms are used to describe refugees, such as “undocumented people” or “vulnerable migrants,” possibly with the idea of making a stronger case for the rights of all people on the move. However, this has caused confusion and inadvertently provided fodder for those who wish to undermine refugees’ rights. “I have to say that, quite apart from the erroneous legal depiction, I find it inappropriate to present people as a sub-set of anything, migrants or otherwise,” he said. “A refugee is a refugee,” he continued, explaining that there is a clear legal definition of refugees linked to absence of national protection. The essence of international protection lies in identifying and recognizing the needs of people fleeing conflict, violence, human rights abuses, and other serious predicaments in their country of origin, Mr. Türk added.

[Empower teachers; give them the freedom to teach, UN urges on World Day](#)

5 October 2017 – Underscoring the critical important role teachers play in ensuring the future for every society, the United Nations today called for empowering educators with the freedom and support they need to undertake

their vital mission.

“Being an [empowered teacher](#) means having access to high-quality training, fair wages, and continuous opportunities for professional development,” the heads of key UN agencies and programmes said today in a joint message on [World Teachers’ Day](#).

Empowerment also means teachers having the freedom to support the development of national curricula, the professional autonomy to choose teaching methods and approaches and being able to teach in safety and security during times of political change, instability and conflict, they added.

The joint message was issued by Irina Bokova, the Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)); Guy Ryder, the Director-General of International Labour Organization ([ILO](#)); Anthony Lake, the Executive-Director of UN Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)); Achim Steiner, the Administrator of the UN Development Programme ([UNDP](#)); and Fred van Leeuwen, the General-Secretary of Education International (a global federation representing organizations of teachers and other education employees).

It emphasized that academic freedom – while important for teachers at all levels of education – is especially critical for higher-education to support the educators’ ability to innovate, explore, and stay up-to-date on the latest pedagogical research.

“This World Teachers’ Day, join us in empowering teachers to teach in freedom so that, in turn, every child and every adult is free to learn – to the benefit of a better world,” they urged.

The importance of building a skilled, valued and empowered education workforce has also been underscored in the [2030 Agenda](#)’s Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)).

Target 4C of Goal 4, in particular, calls for “substantially increasing” the supply of qualified teachers by 2030, and in that context, underlines importance of international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing States.

Marked annually on 5 October since 1994, World Teachers’ Day commemorates the anniversary of the signing of the 1966 UNESCO/ILO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers – the primary reference framework that addresses teachers’ rights and responsibilities at the global scale.

The theme for this year’s commemoration is *Teaching in Freedom, Empowering Teachers*.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the 1997 UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel, which complements the 1966 UNESCO/ILO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers, stressing the importance of teacher autonomy and academic freedom in building a world in which education and learning are truly universal.

Partnerships will play key role in future of work in Europe and Central Asia – UN labour agency

5 October 2017 – The United Nations International Labour Organization's 10th European Regional Meeting concluded today with a call for a future of work where partnerships play a key role in promoting dialogue, social progress and economic growth in the region.

Addressing the closing session of the [Regional Meeting](#) in Istanbul, Turkey, ILO Director-General Guy Ryder said that while there is a considerable amount of uncertainty as to the direction the world of work is heading in, determination and ambition must replace optimism and pessimism.

"We all have to come together with a feeling of [determination and ambition](#)," he said, stressing that ambition means not accepting, not being passive spectators to processes of change, but instead having the determination to be the architects of change, "so that the future of work can be shaped according to what we want."

The three-day gathering focused on the dynamic processes shaping the future of work in the region, which include rapid technological advances, globalization, demographic trends, large movements of [refugees and migrants](#), as well as environmental challenges.

The so-named 'Istanbul Initiative' presents a policy framework to maximize the benefits and minimize the risks relating to the future of work in the region. It also calls on the ILO to provide tripartite constituents in member States with the advice and support they need to design these policies.

"The ILO has not been a passive spectator to change over the past century. It has been a historic architect of change and we have done a lot to make sure that that change has bent in the direction of social justice. That is what we must continue to do," he concluded. The ILO European Regional Meeting takes place every four years. It brings together government, employer and worker representatives from 51 European and Central Asian countries. The theme of this year's meeting was [What future for decent work in Europe and Central Asia: Opportunities and challenges](#).